

PRESS RELEASE
GENERAL REASSESSMENT
CITY OF NORTON

Beginning June 1st, the City of Norton will begin a General Reassessment of all real estate within the City to be effective January 1, 2016. The City has awarded the contract to Blue Ridge Mass Appraisal Company of Staunton Virginia to perform the general reassessment.

The appraisers are required by contract to visit each and every property and also they will be taking photos of all structures. If no adult is home, the appraisers will leave a door hanger requesting additional information on the property. The field work will be completed in the fall of 2015 and each property owner will receive an assessment notice in late October 2015 or around November 1, 2015 of this year indicating the new proposed values. Property owner's will then have the opportunity to make an appointment to meet with the Assessors to discuss the values. In early 2016, a Board of Equalization will convene to consider further appeals based on equalization of properties. The Board of Equalization is composed of City citizens appointed by the Circuit Court.

The Code of Virginia mandates each locality to periodically perform a general reassessment to determine each property's fair market value and its equalization in value to similar properties. The last general reassessment was effective January 1, 2012. The effective date of the upcoming general reassessment will be January 1, 2016.

While assessment values are the basis on what a property owner will pay in real estate taxes, the actual tax rate determines what will actually be paid

For more information concerning the basic process for a General Reassessment, you may visit the City of Norton's website:
www.nortonva.gov

Questions concerning the reassessment, contact the Commissioner of the Revenue's Office at (276)679-0031.

The following questions are most frequently asked by property owners during the reassessment and hearings process.

Q. How often is a reassessment conducted and why is it conducted?

A. The Code of Virginia (§58.1-3250) requires that “In each of the cities of this Commonwealth, there shall be a general reassessment of real estate every two years. Sections 58.1-3258, 58.1-3275, 58.1-3271, 58.1-3276, and 58.1-3278, and other relevant provisions of law shall be applicable to general reassessments of real estate in cities. Any city which has a total population of 30,000 or less, may elect by majority vote of its council to conduct its general reassessments at four-year intervals”. In 1977, the code was amended to further stipulate that all property must be assessed at 100% of market value. Since real estate taxes provide the bulk of each jurisdiction's tax revenue, it is essential that property be periodically reassessed to ensure that taxes are levied in an equitable manner.

Q. Does the new reassessment mean my taxes are going up?

A. Not necessarily: your assessed value and the cities tax rate are used in conjunction to determine the final tax bill.

Q. Why was an outside firm hired to perform the reassessment?

A. The general reassessment process is very labor and time intensive. The entire process takes between 12 and 18 months to perform and requires that an assessor physically visit and assess every parcel in the City. For the City to perform this task internally would require the addition of full time staff and resources. Using economies of scale, an outside firm that specializes in such work can perform the reassessment at a greatly reduced cost to the City.

Q. How did the assessor arrive at my value?

A. Recent sales are analyzed to determine market value rates for all applicable land, outbuilding, and structural features. Those rates are then applied to the factual data about each parcel and adjusted with quality and depreciation factors to equalize the property value with other like parcels.

Q. How is Replacement Cost used by the Assessor?

A. The Cost Approach to value is a time tested and accepted appraisal methodology. It is based upon the premise that the worth of any property can be determined by examining the actual true cost of replacing the structure and then deducting the appropriate level of physical, functional, and or economic depreciation from the estimated cost new. As noted above, the valuation used in mass appraisal application typically relies upon determining individual unit rates from the market by analysis of a large number of known sales. For example, a 1,800 sf dwelling which sold for \$180,000 can be said to have a unit cost of \$100 per square foot. By analyzing a large number of sales appropriate unit rates can be derived for all structural components. Actual unit replacement costs are typically reserved for unique or otherwise unusual property types where known sales data is unavailable i.e., Churches, specialized factories, Schools, etc.

Q. Does the location of my property affect value?

A. As with all real estate analysis, location is a primary concern for assessing the valuation of a property. Features such as water frontage, accessibility, and pleasing views are extremely desirable and add to the intrinsic value of the property. Conversely, poor location such as proximity to a landfill or flood zones can decrease the value of a parcel.

Q. How can my property increase/decrease in value when I have not bought, sold, or done any major repairs or additions to it?

A. The value of your property is a reflection of the local real estate market. As sales prices of similar properties increase/decrease, so will the value of your property.

Q. What is a home site and how is it valued?

A. A “Home Site” or “House Site” is all or part of a parcel that is best suited for single family residential construction. Applying the concept of “Highest and best use”, this part of the land parcel is worth significantly more than the residual acreage.

Q. I live in a mobile home, what is the “Improvement Value” that I am taxed for?

A. Mobile homes frequently have additional improvements, such as paved driveways, fences, decks, etc. These additional improvements add to the overall value of the home and location.

Q. How can you tax an outbuilding that has no electricity and is not livable?

A. The assessed value is the sum of the value of all the factors on your property. Outbuildings such as sheds, barns, and detached garages add functionality and utility to your property, thereby increasing the market value of your parcel.

Q. How can I be taxed for a house that is not complete?

A. All real property must be assessed. Once a foundation has been laid, a structure is considered to exist and therefore has a certain value. Based on permits, building materials, plans, and other information, the completed value of the structure can be estimated. The assessment is based on whatever is present as of January 1st, at which time the structure may only be partially complete. To account for this, only a certain percentage of the estimated completed value is used in determining the current assessed value of the property.

Q. For what reasons would I make an appointment with the assessors?

A. If you feel that your assessment is not equitable with other properties in the City or does not accurately reflect the real estate market, then you should make an appointment with the assessors. You should be prepared to state your case and provide any evidence to support your position.

Q. I just had my property appraised: will that help me in the hearings process?

A. Any materials that may assist the assessors in gaining an accurate portrait of your property may be used to support your position at the hearings. For an appraisal to accurately reflect market conditions, however, it must have been conducted within the past 6 months.

Q. What are my other options to appeal?

A. Should you attend a hearing with the Board of Assessors but not be satisfied with the result, you may schedule a further hearing with the Board of Equalization. After the Board of Equalization has made its changes, should you still not be satisfied, you have the right to petition the Court for an appeal. The decision of that appeal will be final.

Q. If I no longer own this property, what should I do with the notice?

A. You are obligated to forward the notice to the new property owner.

Q. When does the new reassessment go into effect?

A. The final assessed values will be used to calculate the taxes due for the following tax year which would be January 2016.

Q. Can I obtain a copy of my real estate assessment card?

A. Yes, the Board of Assessors can provide you with a copy of your property card on location or by fax.

Q. Is it possible to view my neighbor's assessment?

A. Yes, land books containing information on all taxable property will be available for public use on site at the hearings location and the Commissioner of the Revenue's office.

Q. What role do local governmental officials have in the assessment process?

A. The local governing body normally is involved in the process through the hiring of the assessor, the appointment of the Board of Assessors and Board of Equalization, and establishing the final tax rate. The assessor is a licensed and certified appraiser and as such is fully responsible for all final values. Undue political pressure or influence is considered unethical and as such is never appropriate and would put the appraiser's license in jeopardy. Appraisers are required to follow the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice, (USPAP), guidelines.